

Brief History

The Drug Analysis Laboratory began in the early 1900's as a section of the analytical chemistry laboratory of the Department's Division of Food and Drugs. Located in the State House, the laboratory helped with the enforcement of the Commonwealth's Food and Drug laws. The few drug samples that were submitted to the lab were analyzed by various methods including, color tests, paper chromatography, and physical chemical methods such as melting point.

During the 1960s, with the advent of the hippie and counter culture movement there was a sharp increase in the submission of suspected illegal drugs to the laboratory. The workload of the Drug Analysis section increased. By 1969, the Drug Laboratory had a staff of 3 chemists in Boston, and 2 in Amherst. The laboratories began using analytical instrumentation such as Gas Chromatographs (GC) and Ultraviolet (UV) and Infrared (IR) Spectrophotometers, in the analysis of unknown drug submissions. As workloads increased so did the need for more analytical space. The Boston laboratory moved to 600 Washington St in downtown Boston. The workload continued its steady growth and the yearly report for 1973-74, showed that 8,349 cases were submitted to the Laboratory. The staff of the Boston Drug Analysis section had increased to 6 chemists and an evidence officer

In 1978, again needing more analytical space, the Boston laboratory moved to its current location in Jamaica Plain. In 1981, the Amherst and Boston laboratories were separated from the Division of Food and Drug, and were placed under the control of the State Laboratory Institute. Also around this time, the use drugs such as cocaine and crack cocaine began to explode in Massachusetts. Demand for analyses of controlled substances doubled and tripled. As the numbers of submissions increased, so did the scope and complexity of each analysis. The courts demanded more detailed and more definitive chemical testing. Due to this increase in submissions and the increasing complexity of analyses, the backlog for sample testing routinely became four to six months. New analytical instrumentation was required. The first GC/ MassSpectrometer (GC/MS), was purchased in 1982 along with several new GC's with automatic samplers. Several new analysts were also added to the Boston and Amherst staffs.

Despite the increases in staffing and equipment, the laboratory was still unable to meet the sample turnaround times demanded by the courts. A new funding source, the DRUG ANALYSIS FUND, was created by the Legislature in 1989. This account was funded by fines levied by the courts against defendants found guilty of drug offenses. Up to \$100,000 a year was approved for the Department to purchase equipment, pay for overtime, and to fund training of analysts. With this additional funding and with the hiring of several additional analysts, the laboratory began to meet its commitment of both accurate and timely analysis. In 1999, the Drug Laboratory expended several hundred thousand dollars from the DRUG ANALYSIS FUND to upgrade the Jamaica Plain laboratory.

The Laboratory was also able to purchase several new automated GC/ Mass Specs, the instrumental workhorses of the laboratory, for the Boston and Amherst laboratories.